

## FEATURE PROFILE

# Values, Relationships and Dreams

*An Interview with Bill Bell,  
President of Bell Financial Inc.*



~ By Arlen Keyes ~

**Bill Bell:**

*enjoying  
the fruit  
of his vision  
with Ellen and  
his children*

**A** FEW PEOPLE YOU COME INTO CONTACT with during your journey through life seem to have a remarkable way of living what they believe. They have lined up all aspects of their life and are therefore the same person at work, at home, and at play. They place tremendous importance on relationships and focus on planting seeds in other people inspiring them to accomplish their dreams, expecting very little in return. Yet, paradoxically, their return is great, and they accomplish their goals, and realize dreams with amazing speed. Bill Bell is one of these individuals.

William Bell, B. Math., B.Ed, RHU, CFP is the founder and President, of Bell Financial Inc., an organization that provides services in financial planning, investment management, life & disability insurance, employee benefits, and related areas. At the core of the organization is a vision that speaks of values, relationships, and dreams.

After 4 years of teaching secondary school mathematics (Bill's first dream), he joined the Paul Revere Life Insurance Company in 1984 and carved out a remarkable career spanning 12 years. During that time he went from agent, to brokerage rep, to sales manager and finally to General Manager of the Toronto Brokerage Office (his second dream), where he resided as one of Canada's most respected authorities on disability insurance for 6 years.

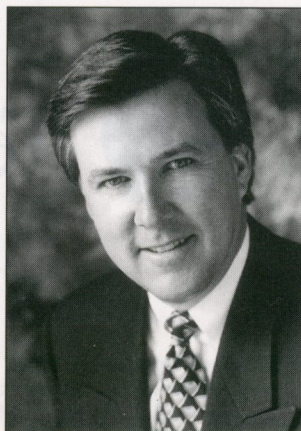
Bill left in May 1996 to pursue yet another dream, that of owning his own business, and of running his business using principles instead of profits as the guideposts. This was, and still is, an interesting "experiment" that by all

measures thus far is working incredibly well.

Including Bill, Bell Financial Inc. now includes six veteran producers, with a variety of background, but a common commitment to the company's vision. They also have three staff members ... currently. And they have lots of business.

The vision for Bell Financial Inc. has the company continuing to expand to 12 producers and 4 staff. Bill has also recently completed a book (released in January 2000), and he has a growing schedule on the speaking "circuit", which will propel his compelling and veracious ideas further into the marketplace.

We asked Bill to provide some insights into how to build a successful financial services practice. Here's what he said.



**Bill Bell:** *a former teacher  
who loved teaching*

*When and how did you decide that you wanted to enter and work in the Life Insurance Industry?*

I was a teacher and I loved teaching, but I was confused about my long-term goals in teaching and perhaps more importantly, discovered that I couldn't afford to be a teacher. I decided that I wanted to try to become a stockbroker. So, I went to several stockbrokers in Barrie and finally found one who appeared interested in me. However, he was only willing to talk further if I went out and got a year's experience selling life insurance. He probably figured I'd go back to teaching. But I actually listened to him, and joined Paul Revere. I didn't even survive the first year, in fact, after 9 months I decided selling insurance wasn't for me. Luckily, Paul Revere wasn't ~ (cont'd p. 19)



## Bill Bell

*continued from page 16.*

quick to let me quit, and they recruited me from the sales side to the brokerage side where I could apply my selling, teaching and product skills in teaching new inexperienced reps in the ways of disability insurance. It was a good fit as I went straight up. Before I knew it, I was a sales manager.

*You ended up doing very well and rising to General Manager of one of Paul Revere's largest offices. Why did you leave what many would have considered one of the plum jobs in the industry?*

To get what I really wanted, which was my own company. I guess in a word - freedom. I wanted to expand outside of disability insurance. I was looking for a way to really impact people's lives, and felt that financial planning would offer me that.

It seemed crazy however, I was a disability expert with good management experience contemplating becoming a sole practitioner financial planner. Ellen (my wife) encouraged me to "pursue my dream." She in fact, is really the person who instigated the whole thing when one night at dinner she asked me when I was going to do something else. She was aware

## Bill Bell

*continued from page 19.*

*Who has helped you along the way?*

We all need a mentor, a coach, whatever you want to call them. Marshall McLuhan said, "I don't know who discovered water, but it definitely wasn't a fish." We often don't see things that are quite obvious to others who are "outside" of our day-to-day business. I'm truly fortunate to have been coached by some great people - the late Bob Gould, and Ross Gilchrist, both from Paul Revere days, and more recently Glen Reid. And I am grateful for the ongoing guidance in business planning and strategy from Business Development Services at Manulife.

*What is the best piece of advice you could offer others?*

Forget how you get paid and focus on what you want to do. Job satisfaction doesn't come from how much you get paid. It comes from making a difference. I guarantee this. When you make a big difference, you will find ~(*cont'd p. 27*)

of my growing uneasiness and forced me to think about it. Once I decided to take the plunge I found a lifeline in the business in Glen Reid who supported me and offered encouragement and insight with respect to literally every hair brain idea I had.

*What have you learned over the span of your career?*

Most of the things I have learned have been life lessons. One thing I am grateful for is that our industry is good at introducing us to inspirational leaders such as Steven Covey, Napoleon Hill, Wayne Dyer, etc. Their lessons are best learned in the context of unlimited opportunity which people in our business of course enjoy. Our business is the perfect place to experiment with ideas like "you are what you think you are." It's a great deal harder for someone who works 9 to 5 in a cubicle.

*What are some specific methods of gaining new clients that work best for you?*

Seminars work best for me. A seminar gives me the opportunity not only to show clients what I do, but also who I am. After all, relationships are two-way. Another successful method has been *wave mail*. This however, requires patience, especially since we don't really follow-up in the traditional way. And, of course, referrals. At this stage of my business,

probably 40% of my new clients come from referrals, 40% from seminars, and the remaining 20% from direct mails. However, I must say the referral sector is growing the fastest.

*Where does your revenue come from if you are not a fee for service planner?*

Let's face it, it's hard not to get paid in our business. When you build a plan with someone, I mean truly build a plan, you help them build a vision. They will WANT to act on it. They look to me, the architect to help them implement the plan. Consequently, my business is quite diversified. At this point, about 40% of revenues come from money products, 40% from life products, and 20% from D.I. and other areas.

*Why are you building a bigger business, involving associates, rather than just yourself and your assistants?*

It's more fun. When I look ahead 10 years, that is what I see. To me, it makes so much sense to connect with people who have skills and abilities that I don't have. The synergy that is created raises the potential of all of us. The key to me is working with people who have similar values and principles. We are having fun! ~(*cont'd p. 26*)

## Bill Bell

*continued from page 26.*

yourself getting big pay.

The media and regulators are incredibly fascinated with how we get paid. Unfortunately they are missing the point. The issue isn't how we get paid; it's how much importance we place on getting paid. How is entirely irrelevant.

*What advice would you offer to new advisors entering into this business?*

Follow your heart and know what you want. Know what you ultimately want to accomplish. Here's a hint - it's not money.

*What are your predictions for the industry for the new Millennium?*

~ (*cont'd p. 28*)

## Bill Bell

*continued from page 27.*

As we become more technologically advanced, which ironically often brings with it more complexity, we seek to find the things that make us human in order to maintain a balance that makes sense. In this way, technology can be seen as a key driver to a growing interest in non-technological things - like relationships, books, travel, and spirituality. People will increasingly be looking for other people with whom they can connect. People who will help them explore who they are, ignite their dreams, and inspire. When Financial planning is used as a tool for life planning, that's when it works best. I see financial planners becoming much more important. ~